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ABSTRACT

This children's book relates the story of Travis and Laura and how their grandfather, a Maidu Indian, teaches them about their history and culture through stories. The book stresses the importance of storytelling as the traditional way of passing on the history of Indian peoples. As part of a school project, Travis tells his classmates the Maidu creation story, told to him many times by his grandfather. The story features Coyote, Earthmaker, and Robin and tells how they created animals, plants, and human beings. Travis' classmates are very interested and ask him many questions about Maidu Indian culture and history. When his granddaughter Laura visits from Los Angeles, grandfather also shares Maidu stories with her. Finally, grandfather visits Travis' school and tells the students the story of brave Thunder Boy. (LP)

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CREATION OF A CALIFORNIA TRIBE

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by Lee Ann Smith-Trafzer and Clifford E. Trafzer

Illustrations by Ross Coates

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Creation of a California Tribe:

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Sierra Oaks Publishing Company
1988

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For Dalbert Castro and all Maidu children
who learn stories from their elders

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The stories found here were provided by two Maidu men, Dalbert Castro of Auburn, California, and Tom Young, who gave his oral history to Roland B. Dixon in 1902 and 1903.

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By the time he reached his grandfather, Travis knew exactly what he wanted to say . . .

1

TRAVIS' SCHOOL PROJECT

Travis could see his grandfather from a distance, as the older man leaned against a giant oak tree in the front yard. Looking younger than his sixty years, Grandfather was a wiry man of average height. His black hair was still untouched by gray. Grandfather was a Maidu Indian who was greatly respected by the Maidu people. As a tribal historian, Grandfather was the keeper of their traditions. He was also a teacher of the tribe's past here in California. He knew all of the Maidu stories, and he often shared them with his children and grandchildren.

The sky above Grandfather's head was deep blue, except for billowy white clouds forming around the Sierra Nevada Mountains. It was a beautiful fall day, but the wind had a touch of winter in it. Deep in thought, Travis pulled his jacket closer as he walked down the road to Grandfather's house. By the time he

reached his grandfather, Travis knew exactly what he wanted to say.

"Hello, Grandfather!" the boy called out as he approached the gate. Grandfather raised his hand to wave in reply.

"Hello, Travis," he responded with his slight accent. "How was school today?"

Grandfather was always interested in his grandchildren's schoolwork, so his question was not a surprise to Travis. But today the boy was delighted to hear this familiar question. He explained to Grandfather that Ms. Smith, his fourth grade teacher at Newcastle Elementary School, had given the class a history assignment. The children had to write a paper on the history of California, and Travis really wanted Grandfather's help on this project.

"You know, Grandfather," Travis said, "most of the kids think that history began with the coming of the Spanish people and the missions." Grandfather nodded his head to show he understood. "But that's just not true! You are always telling us about our history, the history of the Maidu people. I want my paper to be different. I want to write about the time when no one lived in California except the Indians and the animal people."

Grandfather smiled his wide, toothy smile. "How can I help you, Travis?" he asked.

"I want to use what you have told me about the Maidu people to write my paper," Travis explained. "I've written a first draft of my paper. I used a story you told me about the creation of the land the Maidu lived on here in California. Can I read you this story?"

Grandfather nodded his head in agreement. The boy excitedly pulled out his white lined paper and began to read out loud.

. . . one day Earthmaker and Coyote came upon another floating object . . .

2

MAIDU CREATION STORY

People all over the earth have stories to explain the creation of the world. Maidu Indians have creation stories, too, and these stories are handed down by parents and grandparents to their children. To this very day the Maidu Indians remember these stories and share them with others.

The Maidu say that long ago the earth was filled with water. The blue water and sky blended together into a magnificent scene, melting together so that it was impossible to say where the water ended and the sky began. Earth Maker and Coyote floated about seeing nothing but sky and water. Earth Maker grew tired of floating and wanted to find a place to call his own. This idea impressed Coyote.

As Earth Maker and Coyote travelled in the water, they took turns singing a powerful song:

"Little world, where are you? Little world, where are you?"

Over and over they sang this song. Eventually, it occurred to them that this song was not working. So Earth Maker and Coyote changed their song. Now they took turns singing:

"My world of great mountains, where are you? My foggy mountains, where are you?"

Coyote grew tired and stopped singing these songs. "You can sing those power songs," he said to Earth Maker, "but I'm not going to sing any more."

Nevertheless, Earth Maker was convinced that one day they would find a country to call their own. When they did, they would arrange the land in a fine way! Meanwhile, they continued to float in the vast water.

Then one day, the travelers came upon another floating object. It looked like a bird's nest. Although it was very small, Earth Maker was convinced that he could transform it into a place for his country. The nest would have to be stretched and

expanded if it were to become a country. Earth Maker thought about this for a long time. Then an idea struck him.

"I will take this strong rope," Earth Maker said to Coyote, "and extend it to the west, the north, and the northwest." Then the Earth Maker went to work.

He extended the ropes to the west, the north, and the northwest, just as he had told Coyote he would. Then Earth Maker called upon the Robin to pack mud all around the nest. The Robin happily complied, singing a beautiful song of creation as she worked. It took many days for the Robin to complete her job, but she continued to sing until the land was finally made. If you listen today, the Robin still sings that wonderful creation song.

Earth Maker now asked Coyote to sing his creation song. Coyote sang a powerful song about the land he wanted created. Coyote sang in a loud voice:

> "My world, where one will travel by the valley's edge, by great foggy mountains, by the zigzag paths through range after range. I sing of the country I shall travel in. In this world I shall wander."

This song was so beautiful that Earth Maker joined Coyote in chorus after chorus. Slowly, the Maidu world took shape. The only problem was that this world was very small.

Earth Maker decided to make the world larger, so he used his mighty foot to stretch the earth far to the east, the west, the north, and the south. In every direction the earth became larger. The movement and force of the stretching caused the mountains and the valleys to form. Although the Maidu world was becoming larger, it was not stable, because the earth rested on the various ropes.

"Now and then," Earth Maker warned, "when the ropes move back and forth, this earth will shake and tremble." Earth Maker was warning that earthquakes would shake the earth now and then.

Earth Maker was pleased with his country, but it was a lonely land because it was devoid of life. For this reason, he and Coyote created living things. Animals, plants, and human beings were formed and placed on the land. Coyote decided to paint the earth red, since blood was the life-giving source of humans and animals. Even today the rocks and soil of Maidu country are a little bit red in color.

Coyote decided to paint the earth red . . .

Earth Maker and Coyote gave to human beings their separate lands, languages, and physical traits. Earth Maker traveled in every direction of the world, placing white people in one location, black people in another, asians in still another, and so on. Earth Maker finally returned to his home at the center of the earth. This is where he placed the Maidu people.

When Earth Maker created human beings, he gave them intelligence, wisdom, and the means of survival. But most importantly to the Maidu Indians, he instructed them to be kind to one another and to be hospitable to strangers.

People all over the world have their own stories about the beginnings of this planet, as does each of the Indian tribes in America. This Maidu creation story is just one example of the rich variety of such stories. There are actually many other parts to the Maidu story of creation, but this is the main story about the origins of one California Indian tribe--the Maidu.

3

GRANDFATHER LIKES THE STORY

When Travis finished reading Grandfather his report, he waited for the older man to speak. The Maidu people teach their children to respect their elders and to have patience. Grandfather gazed off toward the Sierras, and his mind seemed to be miles away. Finally he turned his attention to Travis.

"Grandson," he said, "you have done well."

Travis smiled, feeling both pleased and relieved. He was happy that he had remembered the creation story accurately.

"You have captured on paper much of what we have taught through the spoken word for generations." Grandfather's face seemed to brighten with his smile. "Travis, you have remembered the creation story well," he continued, placing his arm around the boy's shoulders. "I hope you will be able to share it with the other children in your class."

Although Grandfather said nothing more, Travis knew what he meant. He was pleased with the way his grandson had written the story. But Grandfather believed that it was especially important to tell the Maidu stories. Telling the stories, discussing them, and having the stories repeated time and again was the traditional way of passing on tribal history.

Grandfather and Travis walked together up the path by the large oak tree and into the older man's house. Grandfather's approval of the paper made Travis feel warm inside. He was looking forward to the next school day. Perhaps it would even be possible to tell the Maidu creation story to the rest of the class. Normally Travis would be scared to talk in front of the class, but Grandfather's pride in being a Maidu Indian made Travis proud, too. How nice it would be to share some of the Maidu tribal heritage with his friends at school!

4

LEARNING ABOUT MAIDU INDIANS

Travis had not thought much about his paper on the Maidu creation story since he placed it on the teacher's desk. Then, nearly a week after handing in the story, Ms. Smith announced that she had finished reading all of the papers.

"Overall I am very pleased," she said with a smile. "A few of the essays are really outstanding. I'm going to read a few of them to you now."

Travis' early interest in this project came rushing back to him as he listened to Ms. Smith. Despite Grandfather's urging, Travis had not asked Ms. Smith if he could read his story to the class. Travis was ashamed that he had not followed through with Grandfather's suggestion. Now the boy sat tensely in his seat, hoping that his would be one of the papers read by Ms. Smith. More than anything else, he wanted to be able to tell Grandfather that the children in my class had heard the Maidu creation story.

First, Ms. Smith read Emily Martinez' paper about the Gold Rush. Then she read Steve Foley's work about modern day mountain men in California. Both of the papers were interesting, full of historical facts and funny little stories. As Travis listened to Ms. Smith read these papers, he sank sadly into his chair. Perhaps he had missed the point of the assignment! His paper wasn't about this kind of history at all. Travis was suddenly sure that he would receive a failing grade on this project.

Suddenly, Ms. Smith was talking about Travis. "Travis Molma has written a different type of history paper," she said. "He chose to share a part of his history and that of the Maidu Indians. It is an excellent report."

Travis felt as though every pair of eyes in the classroom was staring right at him. Since he was really only an average student, Travis wasn't used to this kind of attention in school.

"The Maidu Indians lived here long before anyone else," Ms. Smith continued. "Travis has written down what is called an oral history. Indians did not write down their stories, but kept them alive by passing them on from parents and grandparents to children."

A hand shot up in the front row. "But what if the kids forgot what their parents told them? Then the stories would be lost forever!"

"Well, the grown-ups didn't just tell them a story once. They would tell it over and over again, over a long period of time. Then, as the children got older, they would tell the stories back to the grown-ups. If a child made a mistake, he or she was corrected. Then they would tell the story again later. Isn't that right, Travis?"

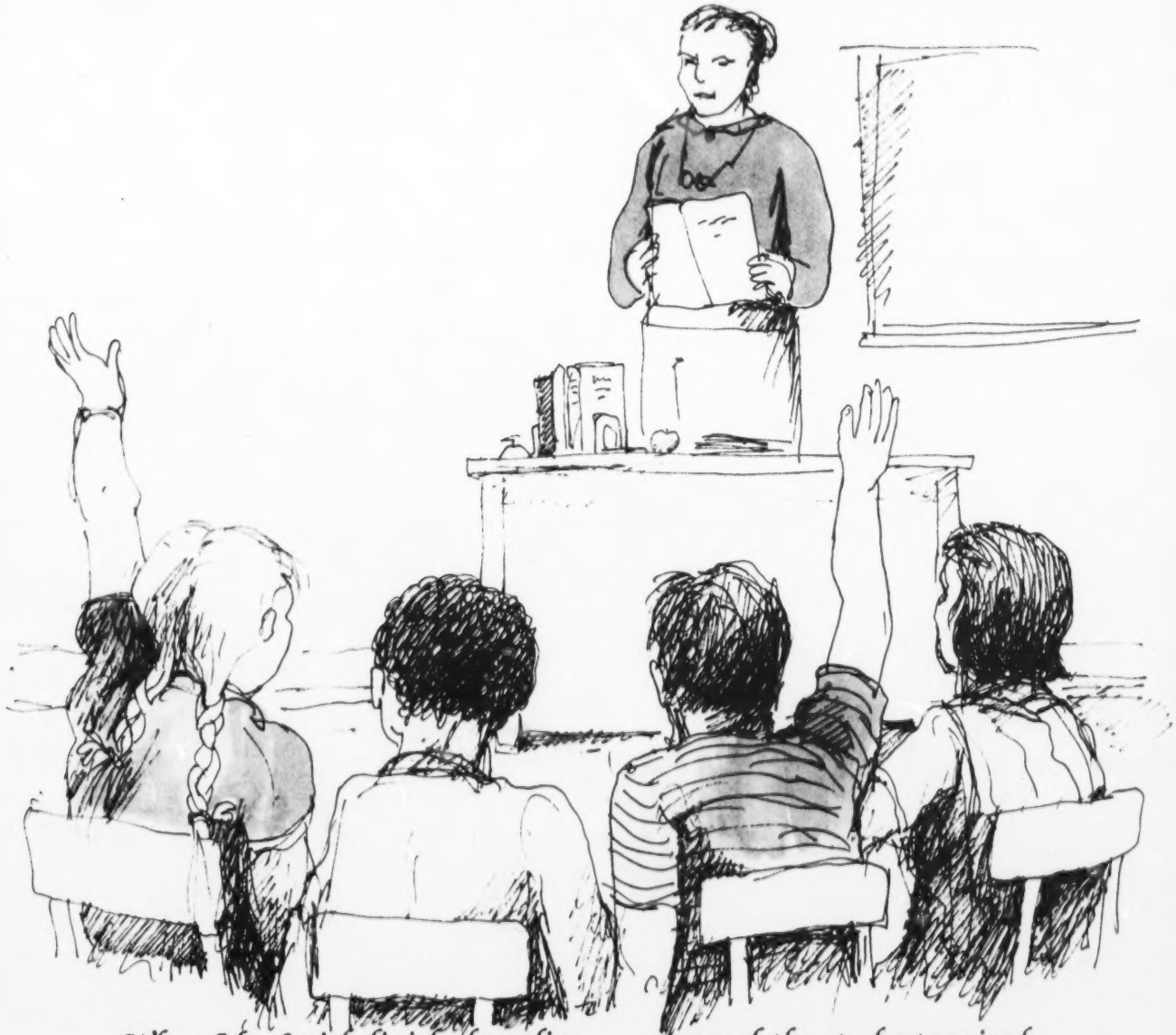
Travis felt himself nod his head weakly in agreement.

"It is a very good way to teach. We do the same thing here at school. We talk about assignments in class so that you will think about and remember them."

Ms. Smith must have noticed that many of the students were losing interest, because she immediately began reading the Maidu creation story that Travis had written.

Grandfather would be pleased, Travis thought. The students were really listening to the story and seemed to be enjoying it. Most of the children had never before heard a story created by Indians to explain their past. When Ms. Smith finished reading Travis' paper, many of the students raised their hands to ask questions.

"Why did the Maidu Indians have this story?" Melissa asked.



When Ms. Smith finished reading . . . many of the students raised their hands . . .

Ms. Smith thought for a moment before answering. "That's not an easy question to answer," she began slowly. "I suppose everyone, including Indians, look for ways to explain how the earth came to exist. This creation story is the Maidu Indian explanation." Ms. Smith hesitated, then looked at Travis. "What would you say, Travis?"

Holding onto the back of his chair for support, Travis stood up and faced the class. "My Grandfather has told my brothers, sisters, cousins, and me many Maidu stories," he said. "Grandfather says that these stories are the history of the Maidu people. The stories are literature, too. They tell us about ourselves, and they teach us how to think and live."

Travis was surprised to find that it was easy to talk to his class about Maidu Indian traditions. He explained that Grandfather had told him that the stories of the Maidu taught the difference between right and wrong, and between good and bad. In many of the stories the Earth Maker teaches the Maidu people what is good, but Coyote goes the other way. He is often bad, and the people are taught not to act like Coyote.

At this point Caitlin Riley said, "But I thought history had to come from something written down. Who wrote down the Maidu stories?"

"Many people believe that Indians had no history until things were written down," Travis responded. "But like Ms. Smith said, our way of passing down our stories is reliable, too."

This time Travis' friend Michael had a question. "I'm not sure I know how the Maidu Indians lived. I mean, what did they eat and what kind of houses did they live in. Could you tell us, Travis?"

Grandfather had told Travis all about how the Maidu Indians had lived. "The Maidu ate fruits, vegetables, and meat just like we do today," he said. "Women gathered wild strawberries, blackberries, and currents. The Maidu ate these fruits fresh, but they also dried them in the sun so they could eat them in winter, too. All they had to do was add some water and they could be eaten."

The Maidu also ate wild lettuce and carrots. They gathered roots of the tule and camas. These looked and tasted something like potatoes, and had lots of vitamin C.

"Didn't they do any hunting?" one of the boys asked.

"Sure," Travis said. "They hunted deer, bear, quail, rabbits, raccoons, squirrels, geese, and porcupine. The Indians didn't just use the meat from the animal, though. For example, they used

animal skins for blankets and clothing. Porcupine spines were used for needles and to make jewelry."

One of the students asked if the Maidu lived in tipis like Indians they had seen on television.

"No," Travis said, shaking his head. "They lived in different kinds of houses. When the Maidu moved around hunting and gathering food, they built temporary homes made out of logs and brush mats. When they made their winter homes, they used the same materials but made their houses larger and warmer. Grandfather told me that the people spent a lot of the winter months inside, where they told stories."

In fact, it was during the cold, rainy winter months that Grandfather's parents and grandparents had told him the Maidu Indian stories. After hearing the stories repeated over and over, Grandfather was able to learn his lessons very well.

Ms. Smith stood up at her desk. "You know, Travis," she said, "I think you have learned your lessons well, too. Thank you for teaching us so much about the Maidu Indians."

To Travis' surprise, Ms. Smith began to clap her hands, and the rest of the class joined in, too! Travis couldn't wait to tell his grandfather that the other children had enjoyed hearing the Maidu creation story.

During the winter months, Grandfather's parents told him the Maidu stories . . .

As the bell rang to signal the end of the school day, Ms. Smith came over to Travis' desk to speak to him. "Please give this note to your grandfather," she said, handing him a folded piece of paper. "I just want him to know how much we enjoyed learning about Maidu history. Perhaps he would visit our class one day and share more of his stories."

Later Grandfather said he was proud of his grandson for speaking in class. But everything Travis told his classmates came from his grandfather. One day, Travis thought, he would tell these same things to his own children.

The sound of a footstep behind him startled Grandfather . . .

5

LAURA AND GRANDFATHER

Grandfather sat at his favorite chair in his small, wood-framed house. It was warm and quiet in the small but tidy living room. Grandfather stared thoughtfully at the blue flames dancing in his small heating stove. He was listening for a knock on his front door. Grandfather was waiting for his daughter, Mary, and his granddaughter, Laura, to arrive.

Nearly a year had passed since Grandfather last saw Mary and Laura. They lived in Los Angeles, but Grandfather lived in the heart of Maidu Indian country. His home was on the rancheria near Auburn, California. It took almost eight hours of driving for Mary and Laura to travel from Los Angeles to Grandfather's home. Often Grandfather wished that Mary and her family lived closer so that he could visit them more often.

Mary and her husband were happy in Los Angeles. They both had good jobs and many friends. But sometimes Mary

became lonely for the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Sometimes she became homesick for the tall pines and the big oak trees. In the spring, Mary missed the orange poppies which covered the countryside. Most of all, she missed her father. So she and Laura were driving to Auburn to spend some time with Grandfather.

The low sound of gravel crunching beneath the tires of a car told Grandfather that his visitors had arrived. As the car drew closer to the house and the noise of the its engine grew louder, Grandfather walked to the door. He watched the two bright lights wind their way back to his house. Then Grandfather walked outside to greet his daughter and granddaughter.

The next morning, Grandfather rose before sunrise. With a cup of steaming coffee in his hand, he left the house and followed an old trail to a place with a view of the distant mountains. Grandfather watched as the yellow rays of dawn crept over the snowy Sierras. Silently, Grandfather drew strength from the rising sun. He thanked the Creator for another day.

The sound of a footstep behind him startled Grandfather. "Good morning, Laura," Grandfather said. "I'm surprised to see you up so early!"

Laura smiled. She was happy to be with her grandfather again. As they walked back to the house, Grandfather and Laura talked about her school. She had always been a good student, and Grandfather was very proud of her. He asked her what she had learned in school about American Indians.

"My teacher is very interested in Indian culture," Laura said. "He often asks me about my Indian heritage."

Grandfather was surprised but pleased. "Do you tell your class about the Maidu people?" he asked.

"I don't know that much about the Maidus," Laura said. "But I want to learn." Grandfather nodded but said nothing. "Travis sent me a copy of the paper he wrote for his history class. He said that you told him the Maidu creation story."

"That's true," Grandfather said. "I suppose that with you living so far away, we just haven't had the chance to really talk about being a Maidu Indian."

"Grandfather, please tell me some of your stories," Laura said. "I really do want to know more about the Maidus and our history."

"Sure," Grandfather replied. "Later, when the chores are done and there is time to talk, I will share a story with you. But you must promise to listen carefully. That way you can tell it to

your teacher the next time he asks you about your Indian heritage. One day, you might even tell the story to your own children!"

6

LAURA LEARNS ABOUT LIZARD AND BAT

It was mid-afternoon when Grandfather finally announced he was ready for storytelling. Laura quickly appeared and sat down near Grandfather. Even Mary settled into a chair to listen, hoping to hear one of her favorite stories.

"The story I want to tell you," Grandfather began, "happened a long, long time ago. It was a time when all of the animals and people spoke the same language. The Maidus and the animal people were living here in the foothills." Grandfather paused to see if Laura was listening, then continued with his story.

One day Lizard and Bat sat talking. They enjoyed talking about their beautiful world. They liked the warm days and the cool nights. Even the rain was not so bad, because it brought the tall trees and the beautiful wildflowers. The red sunsets made the perfect ending to the day, Lizard and Bat agreed.

Suddenly, a surprised look crossed Bat's face. Talking about the red sunsets reminded Bat that when the people moved to the foothills, they forgot to bring fire with them. Bat and Lizard talked and talked, until finally Bat decided on a plan to bring fire to the foothills.

"Lizard," Bat said, "the animal people living by the ocean have fire. Run as fast as you can to the coast and bring back some fire for us."

"Your plan is a good one," Lizard said to Bat. "I am a very fast runner. I do not mind making this trip to the coast. I will visit the animal people there and bring back some fire for us."

The animal people living on the coast were happy to see Lizard. They welcomed him with food and drink. Then, before he left, Lizard was given a torch to carry the fire back to the Maidu country.

"But how will you keep the fire from going out?" some of the animal people asked Lizard.

"I am a great runner," said Lizard to the animal people living on the coast. "I will run as fast as I can to reach the foothills before the fire goes out."

"How will you keep others from stealing the fire from you?" Lizard was asked.

Lizard ran so fast that he was sure no one could see him . . .

"No one will see me," Lizard laughed. "I am too fast for them to catch me anyway!"

So off Lizard ran, over the hills between San Francisco and the Sacramento Valley. He was very careful to protect the torch, so the fire would not go out. Lizard ran so fast that he was sure no one could see him. But he was wrong.

Lizard ran right through a group of Sand Hill Cranes who were playing a hand game. He was sure they could not see him, because he was so fast. But they did see Lizard and his torch.

"That fire would be very good for us," said one of the Sand Hill Cranes. "We should take that fire for ourselves!" The other Sand Hill Cranes agreed and took off after Lizard.

The Sand Hill Cranes ran after Lizard so fast that they nearly overtook him. Lizard became frightened and tried to run even faster, but he tripped and fell. The torch fell from Lizard's hand and the fire caught on some nearby grass. Quickly, the grass fire spread across the valley.

The grass fire was so large it could be seen for many miles. Even Bat saw the fire. He thought it was just the flame from the torch. Bat was so excited that he couldn't wait for Lizard to reach the foothills. He decided that he wanted to look at the fire up close. Bat caught sight of Lizard and flew down toward his friend.

Lizard raced to his friend's side and found 'Bat badly burned . . .

Bat drew too close to the fire and his eyes were burned by the hot flames. He was in trouble! He could not see at all! Lizard quickly raced to his friend's side. He found Bat badly burned and all black from the fire. Bat's tail was completely burned off and his wings were singed almost all the way through.

Worst of all, Bat's eyes were burned. He was nearly blind. Lizard put pitch in Bat's eyes, hoping it would bring back Bat's eyesight, but it didn't help.

"That is why bats can't see well even today, and why bats are black with paper-thin wings," Grandfather said, bringing his story to an end. "That is also why they have such tiny eyes. What do you think of my story of Bat and Lizard and their search for fire, Laura?"

He had been watching Laura closely as he told the story. She had given her full attention to Grandfather. Even Mary had been caught up in the tale. Grandfather was pleased at their interest.

"It was wonderful, Grandfather!" Laura said. "Can you tell me another Maidu story?"

Grandfather laughed. "All in one afternoon?" he asked. "You'll be here for a few more days. I think there will be plenty of time for stories, don't you?"

Laura nodded, but she was disappointed. Then, with a twinkle in her eye, she said, "Promise me another story after dinner then!"

It was Grandfather's turn to nod his head. "I already know which story to tell," he said. "Tonight I'll tell you all about Salt Man."

Coyote pointed to a white shadowy man among the group . . .

7

SALT MAN

Dinner had been eaten and the dishes cleared away when Grandfather finally agreed to tell another story. The cold night air combined with a March wind to turn the little house cold. After stoking the fire with wood to warm the living room, Grandfather settled into his favorite chair. He began the story very suddenly.

Coyote had become very hungry one night. So he went to the Maidu people to ask for their help.

"I am very hungry," Coyote said. "I would like a salmon to eat. Will you catch a salmon for me?"

"We'll try," said the Maidu people, "but we may not be able to catch a salmon." To their surprise, they caught a very large salmon. They brought it back to the foothills and cooked it over a huge fire. Everyone joined in the celebration except Coyote. He stood back and watched while everyone else ate.

The Maidu enjoyed the taste of the salmon so much, they began to eat the fish very quickly. Pieces of salmon began to fall on

the ground. One of the elders of the tribe was especially messy. All around the ground where he sat there lay large chunks of salmon meat.

Coyote spoke to the sloppy elder. "See those chunks of salmon you dropped on the ground?" he asked. The elder nodded. "Pick them up and eat them. See if they taste good to you."

The elder did as he was told. When he picked up the pieces of salmon, he noticed that they had small, white rocks on them. But he ate the salmon anyway.

"The meat is very sweet and good," the elder said to Coyote.

Coyote pointed to a white, shadowy man among the group. "That is Salt Man," Coyote explained. "If you like the taste of the small, white rocks on the salmon, then you must catch Salt Man."

The Maidus immediately put down their salmon and chased Salt Man. He was a very fast runner. The Maidu people ran after Salt Man for several miles. Finally, Salt Man tripped and fell. He fell down at a place near present-day Lincoln, California. When he hit the ground, Salt Man broke into thousands of pieces.

Grandfather ended the story, saying, "If you go over to Lincoln today, you will find the many pieces of Salt Man."

Mary nodded. "I remember the place, Dad," she said. "We went there when I was a kid."

Grandfather looked at Laura. "You see, that's the way with us Maidu," he said. "We have these old stories that explain our past, our land, and our ways. This is our history. I hope you will remember these stories about Lizard, Bat, and Salt Man."

Putting his arm around Laura's shoulders, Grandfather said, "If you like, you can come with me tomorrow. Travis' school is not on vacation. His teacher has invited me to tell a story to the class."

"I would like that, Grandfather," Laura said as she gave him a good-night kiss. "Thank you for sharing these stories with me. I look forward to hearing more stories tomorrow."

"You know, Dad," said Mary after Laura had gone to bed, "Laura has really been looking forward to this trip. Ever since Travis sent his paper to her, she's wanted to hear some of your stories."

"I wonder if she'll remember what she has heard tonight," Grandfather said.

"I think so," said Mary. "I know I will never forget your stories." She smiled at Grandfather. "You are the best storyteller I know."

All at once the boy came upon a frightening sight . . .

8

GRANDFATHER IN THE CLASSROOM

The students became very excited when they saw Travis' grandfather enter the classroom. Ms. Smith stood in front of the room, trying hard to get everyone's attention. Slowly, silence settled across the room.

"We are very lucky today to have a special guest," Ms. Smith announced. "Travis' grandfather is a Maidu Indian elder who lives here in our community. He is a well-known storyteller, and he is here today to share a Maidu Indian story with you."

Grandfather walked in front of the teacher's desk. Some of the students clapped, but others squirmed in their seats. They were not sure they wanted to hear Indian stories. Travis and Laura were proud of Grandfather. They thought he was very brave to speak in front of the class.

"The Maidu people have hundreds of stories," Grandfather explained. "As I drove down Indian Hill Road, I tried to decide which story I would tell you. Then I heard some thunder in the

distance. The thunder reminded me of the story of Thunder Boy. It was one of my favorite stories as a child. I'd like to share it with you today."

Laura looked around the room. She was pleased to see so many students listening to Grandfather. He had captured their attention with only a few words.

Grandfather explained that the first Maidu Indians lived in many villages in northern California. Strange things began to happen in one of the larger villages. People started to disappear without explanation. Women would go out to collect firewood or carry water, and they would not return. Men would go out on a hunt and never return. Even boys and girls began to disappear.

The entire village lived in fear. They needed food and water and firewood to survive. But every time someone left camp to get wood or to hunt or fetch water, they disappeared.

Finally only an old man and his two grandchildren were left in the village. They hid in their lodge because they were very frightened. But soon they became cold and hungry. The old man announced that he would go hunt some food. The children begged him not to go, but their grandfather would not listen to them.

Of course, the old man never returned from his hunting. The little boy and his older sister were very sad. The winter winds

began to blow, and the weather became bitterly cold. The children were weak from hunger and numb from the cold.

The little boy finally decided that he must leave the lodge and search for firewood. His sister agreed to let him go, but only if he promised not to wander too far away from the village. The boy nodded his head as he left the lodge.

After only a short time, the little boy returned with an armload of firewood. His sister warned him not to carry so much wood at one time. She was afraid he would hurt himself. But on each trip, the little boy returned with a huge log or stump. His sister was amazed at the mighty strength of her younger brother.

Although his sister warned him of the great danger lurking in the woods, the little boy was curious. He wondered what had happened to his grandfather and the other villagers. One day, his curiosity overcame him. The little boy wandered far away from his lodge.

All at once, the boy came upon a frightening sight. There on a flat rock in front of him were the villagers. They lay in lifeless forms on the rock, frozen in time. A spell had fallen other the Indians, as though someone or something unseen had control over them.

. . . the stronger and more skillful the boy became . . .

As the boy stared at his friends and family members, a stranger approached. His name was Lizard Man. He looked angry and mean.

"What are you doing here?" Lizard Man demanded.

"Nothing at all," replied the boy.

"Perhaps you are looking for a fight," said Lizard Man.

The boy answered Lizard Man in a calm voice. "I did not come here for a fight," he said. "I came to find my friends and relatives. But I will fight you if you insist on a battle."

Lizard Man pounced on the boy and the two began to wrestle. At first Lizard Man seemed to be winning the fight. But the longer they fought, the stronger and more skillful the boy became. Finally he defeated Lizard Man.

During the struggle, the boy had found his power. He was able to unlock Lizard Man's spell over the people. Before they woke up, the boy raced back to his sister. She helped him clean his wounds as the boy explained what had taken place.

"I must leave you now," the boy said to his sister. "I must go to the Valley Above the Earth."

"But why must you leave?" asked the sister, shocked at his words.

'Do you hear?' Grandfather asked. 'It is Thunder Man sending you his greeting.'

"I cannot say," answered the boy, "except to tell you that the Valley Above the Earth is my new home. But I will always remain close by you."

His sister began to cry. She did not want her brother to leave. She was afraid she would never see him again.

"When I reach my new home," he said, "I will let you know I have safely arrived." With that the boy was gone.

When the villagers returned to their camp, the girl told them what had happened. As the people gazed up at the sky, clouds formed over the mountains. Then, for the first time, they heard the roar of thunder. The thunder roared again and again. Then the people understood that the boy had been called to the sky to become Thunder Boy.

"Thunder Boy eventually grew into a man," Grandfather said. "Today he is known as Thunder Man. He still roars overhead, sometimes distant and sometimes loud and crashing."

As Grandfather spoke, the rumble of distant thunder could be heard. "Do you hear?" Grandfather asked with a smile. "It is Thunder Man sending you his greeting. I think he enjoyed our story."

From the looks on the faces of the children, they seemed to agree!

A stirring story unfolds as Grandfather shares with Travis, Laura, and the students of Newcastle Elementary School a series of Maidu Indian tales. Travis relates to his classmates the Maidu creation story, told to him many times by Grandfather, which features Coyote, Earthmaker, and Robin. Grandfather then shares Maidu stories with his granddaughter, Laura who is an urban Indian. Finally, Travis' classmates at Newcastle School learn about Thunder Boy. Join the many colorful characters from the Maidu Indian past in this delightful book.

Lee Ann Smith-Trafzer holds the B. A. and M. A. degrees in History from Washington State University. She is a professional writer and attorney. Clifford E. Trafzer is Professor and Chair of Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Riverside, and an award-winning author of several books on Native Americans.

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"I belong to the Earth out of which I came." Toohoolhoolzote (Nez Perce)

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